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SUBJECT: RIVAL VLADIVOSTOK DEMONSTRATIONS HELD WITHOUT VIOLENCE

11. Summary. Government detractors and supporters held simultaneous demonstrations in Vladivostok on Saturday, January 131. Though police presence was heavy throughout the city, with militia men at nearly every intersection downtown, and despite the Communists' insistence on holding the rally in an unauthorized location, there were no reports of violence. Smaller anti-government rallies were held throughout Primorye.

Rival Demonstrations Orderly, Well-Attended

12. The Communist-organized anti-government rally began in a park in the downtown area of Vladivostok with about 500 party supporters and members of the NGO TIGR (Community of Initiative Groups of Russia). The group then marched towards the train station in the center of the city, gathering and additional 500 participants along the way. At its peak, about 2,500 participants gathered under Lenin's outstretched arm across from the station, though official media placed the number at 400. The Lenin statue is at the top of a long staircase that was filled with banners and protesters who were enthusiastic despite the negative 11 degree Celsius temperature. The protest was orderly and well organized, with loudspeakers and an apparent agenda. It lasted for about two hours and featured an open microphone for participants to voice their concerns. A nearby cafe was filled with protesters as they came in to warm up after voicing their discontent.

13. The Yedinaya Rossiya-sponsored pro-government rally had a decidedly more upscale look, with many participants arriving via Lexus and other luxury cars. It took place in front of an historic submarine at the port of Vladivostok less than a kilometer from the rival rally. The rally lasted about thirty minutes and attracted about 2,000 participants who, according to Consulate contacts, were strongly "advised" to attend by their supervisors at work or administrators at their universities. Participants declared agreement the Kremlin's economic crisis amelioration measures, support for domestic automobile manufacturers, and confidence in plans for the APEC Forum. Primorye Governor Sergei Darkin spoke and several State Duma deputies arrived from Moscow, including Vladimir Pekhtin, who represents Primorye in Moscow and is said to be a future contender for the Governor's position.

Authorities Choose Lower Profile

14. Authorities appear to have wanted to keep a low profile during this demonstration and avoid attention like that brought from last month's well-publicized violence. While police presence was heavy throughout Vladivostok, with militia men at nearly every intersection downtown and all security personnel in the Kray officially on call for the whole weekend, there were no arrests of protesters, and OMON forces kept their distance. One motorist was briefly detained for driving too slowly near the anti-government protest site, raising suspicion with a militia officer that he was planning to intentionally cause a traffic

slowdown.

15. One potential flashpoint was that organizers vowed earlier in the week to hold their protest downtown, despite that fact that authorities had granted permission only for gathering at remote area of the city. In an apparent effort to avoid the conflict that occurred during the last demonstration, the Head of Kray Department of Interior called a meeting with protest organizers and Friday, and implied that he ignore their violation of their permit if they could "be responsible for order" during the rally.

Comment

16. Immediately after December's violent crackdown on demonstrators, debate arose among authorities both in Moscow and locally about how to handle further rallies. As reported earlier in the Vladivostok Three-Minute Briefing, the debate led to disagreement at the highest level, with Putin urging a harder crackdown and Medvedev advocating a softer approach. In Vladivostok, Governor Darkin reportedly also favored tougher action, while Vice-Governors below him hoped for less conflict. Given the fact that no violence occurred during this latest demonstration, and that OMON Zubr Special Forces were not called in from Moscow to assist this time, it is clear that, at least for this demonstration, authorities chose to avoid violence and further bad press. There will surely be more demonstrations, though nothing has been announced yet.

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